Message to the Sangha from Venerable Gyatrul Rinpoche

Shooting stars, foggy vision, burning lamps
Elusive mirage, morning dew
Bubbles on water
Dreams, lightning and clouds.
See them as the true nature
Of all evolving phenomena.

People don’t like to hear this but I’d like to say it anyway because at this time I am facing impermanence. At 83 years old I am still learning that, and I don’t exactly get it. I don’t even trust impermanence. Sometimes I do trust, sometimes I don’t trust. I’m like a picture showing everything, everything impermanent -- outer, inner, myself, everything; my body, my speech, my mind, my situation, everything is impermanent. My life is impermanent.

I think everybody is the same in this situation. Continued on next page.
We need to look at our own minds and see what is happening. Everybody loves themselves. Isn't this true? You have to try to have a positive attitude. In Tibet we say have a "sempa karpo", a white mind or a kind mind. If you love yourself then it's time to try to do something without complaining, "I have this problem and that problem," and so on. Right now you have the freedom to resolve it. In the future when we die, we don't have this freedom. Even bigger problems are coming, more problems for everybody, and not just problems for Buddhists, but for all sentient beings. If we are too late in our preparations, then we will not benefit ourselves successfully. Now, we have the freedom. Therefore, if you love yourself, be honest with yourself. Trust more in the Buddha, dharma, sangha.

Don't take refuge in samsara and the five poisons.

Enough is enough!

You know what is beneficial. For eons and eons no sentient beings benefited from following samsara. They only harmed themselves. People in the past did not gain anything from following samsara. If they didn't get anything, we won't get anything. Up to now, I didn't get anything. Therefore, I need to turn towards the Buddha, dharma, sangha. Still, I make a big deal of samsara and my five poisons. This is due to too many years of habit.

For those of you who received the Dudjom Tersar initiation last year at Orgyen Dorje Den, I am so happy for you. I think you are really lucky. In particular, if you received Dudjom Lingpa's Troma empowerment, you received treasures and you received the true essence of Troma. Receiving these means you have received the essence of Dharmakaya, the highest, according to His Holiness Dudjom Rinpoche.

We need all aspects of the path, be it kye rim, (development stage), dzog rim (completion stage), Dzogchen (great perfection stage) or the union of kye rim and dzog rim. We need all of these together as the path and we have received them all.

You might think that you can always practice in the future, but right now you have a teacher. Dudjom Rinpoche taught Sangye Khandro for so many years. Piece by piece. Now she has the real lineage because His Holiness Dudjom Rinpoche said during the time he was teaching in Hong Kong, "This girl, she really has karma with Troma, really she can practice and teach others in the future. She can really benefit others, therefore I am teaching her." Dudjom Rinpoche taught her beginning ngondro, then how to do retreat. After she did that she did a few years of mantra practice. Then she practiced kye rim and dzog rim. Everything she learned for His Holiness. Then later, when he was teaching in the Bay Area he spoke to Sangye Khandro and myself. He said that Sangye had received the Dzogchen nicely and some general togyal teachings.

He asked me to please help teach and support her during her practice. I thought to myself, I don't really know this, so I can't say yes, yet at the same time I can't say no. So, Sangye and I were talking in a huddle and came up with the question, "Could Holiness teach us the Tersar tsalung practice?" After that we got kind of scared because His Holiness broke out into great laughter and was muttering, "Ha ha ha ha...you go up to the top and then back down to the bottom, the beginning...ha, ha, ha, ha." He was kind of scolding and laughing and then he said directly to Sangye, "This is the highest, Dzogchen. Do your practice. You need to teach in the future. This is your job. You have already received the highest teachings. From myself or Dudjom Lingpa, there is nothing higher."

This time if you received the empowerments, you received from Dudjom Rinpoche's main

“Trust more in the Buddha, dharma, and sangha.”
number one Khenpo brothers. Everybody should continue doing their practice on into the future. Stage by stage, piece by piece. If you need high Dzogchen practice, this is the one. Therefore I am so happy for your good fortune. Keep practicing. Don't drop it. Right now we have a teacher. Get it. This is the one.

So please, everybody try. One way it is not my business, but you are asking me to give you some message and words of advice. Is it true or not? Look at my age, and how many experiences I went through, wonderful things and horrible things. Right now things are okey dokey. That's wonderful, but then comes the sunset and then I am finished. Everybody thinks, "I am so smart" and all of their stuff is so important. Actually, none of this is important according to the Buddha. If the bodhisattvas see us thinking that all of this is so important, they will be crying day and night.

Don't be a hero, and don't be smart. Be honest with yourself. So that's my advice. It's embarrassing because I have nothing special myself, but I do say this with a kind of big mouth.

If you want to understand more about how His Holiness Dudjom Rinpoche received his terma revelations, please read the excerpt that is included in this newsletter.

Also, I suggest that you read His Holiness Dudjom Rinpoche’s little blue book, "Counsels from my Heart." And then if you can practice in this way, that would be wonderful. Of course these days many of you are practicing harmoniously, with patience, generosity, faith and trust. This is real Buddhism. Tashi Delek.

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Choosing to Listen

The time has come.
There is no truer nakedness than beginning.
This step directs your life.
Here you are in the moment of decision, faced with dreams.
To choose between them or wake – this is the choice.
Every day has been the same, hurrying around the point, not knowing how to make it happen.
And now you have opened, the riches of your merit have come together.
You have offered to hear these words.

—Julie Rogers
As the one who claims to be the reincarnation of Traktung Dudjom Lingpa, I, Jigdral Yeshe Dorje am but a deceptive practitioner during these degenerate times. Based on the prediction of the Lake Born Guru I was called Garwang Drodul Lingpa in the same way an old dog is empowered with a lion's title. In my previous lifetimes, due to the loving compassion of Guru Padmasambhava and consort, I was held as their disciple to be tamed. Through that karmic connection, I have uncontrived profound devotion for them. Through that, I have received the signs of their blessings many times over and not only that, it was also predicted in Orgyen Dechen Lingpa's terma:

In the future, to the east at the nine-peaked mountain in Tibet,

in the sacred land of the naturally originating Vajra Varahi,

the reincarnation of Drogben Lotsawa will be born in a royal family.

As a mantra practitioner of fearless conduct his name will be Jnana.

Endowed with prajna, his conduct will be childlike and his demeanor uncertain.

He will reveal the new treasures and sustain the old.

Whoever connects with him will be led to the Copper Colored Mountain.

And so as predicted, from youth I discovered many terma receptacles that belonged to me. Nevertheless I felt that they were just the display of my own fixated confused phenomena. Once reaching age thirteen I actually saw Guru Rinpoche in a vision. After that I met several girls who seemed like playmates and they presented me with a yellow parchment scroll with dakini writing. Although many amazing signs occurred, the auspicious link between place, time, companion and retinue was incomplete and the outer and inner circumstances caused me to become so discouraged that I set the scroll to fire by offering it to the great mother Gokarmo.

From that time onward I tried to safeguard the previous terma revelations and let go of any hope or fear concerning the discovery of new treasures. While I was just biding time without any particular aim, in my 25th year, on the 25th dakini day of the seventh month, Year of the earth Dragon, the practitioner Trulshig Dorje received predictions from the dakinis. Suddenly he came to see me requesting that I compose a profound dakini sadhana immediately. I thought that I would write just a daily self-generation sadhana but while doing so the process of writing became very different than ever before. The words and meaning of the sadhana became extremely vivid in my mind and although I knew that this was what is called a mind treasure I did not choose to term it a terma revelation. During a single sitting, I wrote down whatever naturally came into my mind without adjusting or correcting anything. I then gave this to Trulshig, and he went to the Yarlung Crystal Cave to practice. He
gained confidence in this dharma through the excellent signs of blessing that he received at that time.

Again he requested me to write the complete cycle of sadhanas for the outer, inner and secret accomplishments of the dakini, including all of the enlightened activity. His requests were so persistent my ears began to ache. In order to appease him I began to write by using the root verses of the previous sadhana as the basis. In this way I was able to write several supplementary practices.

Later, the aristocrat named Tsewang Rigdzin Namgyal experienced the awakening of past karma with this path and due to his pure intention he became the keeper of this profound dharma. After that I was able to complete the inner meaning of the upadesha for the approach mantra, the commentary and all aspects of the practice both clearly and concisely so that the entire practice cycle of the Heart Essence of the Dakini became complete.

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**Proof of Life**

There is only this moment and memory.
Like a bird let go in a cathedral 
mind flies every direction searching for the nest, 
a familiar proof of life to rest in.

Elusive home, the body, the idea of it.

The next second is empty as the dream of the last one.

—Julie Rogers

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**Looking Glass**

A mirror that captures the eyes that identify, and cuts the hands of those who try to hold it up, obscured with the breath of words that name it and streaked with tears of those who think it real.

When facing pain it is pain.
When facing joy it is joy.
When facing the heavens space fills it with the vast emptiness of what is and left alone, the self is a reflection.

—Julie Rogers
Throughout the past year we have experienced times of quietness and times filled with flurries of excitement. Yet one aspect seems to remain constant – the ever pervading buzz of the dharma resonating throughout all.

Looking back on the year, different phenomena surface to the foreground of the mind. The beautiful Guru Rinpoche statue that Gyatrul Rinpoche kindly helped us construct many years ago continues to draw people from near and far to Guru Rinpoche Park. How fortunate we are to have such a wonderful space to practice and the blessings of such amazing teachers such as Gyatrul Rinpoche. The Tibetan community and sangha members continue to visit the statue on a regular basis to meditate and to do khorwa progressing with our collective aspiration to accumulate 100 million Vajra Guru Mantras. Four lovely prayer wheels, compliments of sangha members, have been added to each corner of the open-air structure surrounding Guru Rinpoche to turn while doing khorwa. Shower of Blessings with tsog continue to be held at the statue on Guru Rinpoche Day.

A Monday night study group carries on with meetings each week to discuss dharma texts, listen to teachings and watch dharma related documentaries. Over the past months, the group has been listening to the wonderful teachings of the Venerable Yangthang Rinpoche on ‘The Flight of the Garuda’ as taught in Ojai, California. A multitude of thanks to Mirror of Wisdom Video for producing this DVD and countless others - making it possible for so many to benefit from the vast wisdom of such brilliant vajra masters.

Earlier this spring our sangha had the great fortune to receive from the Venerable Khenchen Namdrol Rinpoche a very large (2425 pound) brass Padmasambhava statue and several hundred zung, mantra rolls, to be placed in the statue. Affiliated with the Global Project for World Peace, the statue is one of twenty-five to be erected throughout the world specifically to deter negativity and spread blessings of compassion and wisdom. One of the twenty-five is located at Orgyen Dorje Den in Alameda. Many sangha members were present to welcome the
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Padmasambhava statue in Austin with smiles, khatas, prayer flags, flowers, and incense. It is our heartfelt aspiration to create an appropriate space for the statue that can benefit many for years to come.

A few months following the receipt of the large Padmasambhava statue, the Venerable Khenchen Namdrol visited Austin to deliver profound teachings on Guru Rinpoche’s Seven Line Prayer and to bless the statue and future temple grounds. The teachings were translated by Sangye Khandro and Lama Chonam. Shashi Reitz attended from Tashi Choling and assisted Khen Rinpoche with chopen duties for the teaching.

Gathered under a temporary tent structure atop the future site of the temple, we listened attentively to the teachings of Venerable Khenchen Namdrol – all the while torrential rain poured down from the sky outside. The next day it poured, and again the next. And with such downpours, flooding occurs – which it did, things that make it more challenging to run a smooth event which they did. When the electricity went out and Khenchen Namdrol was asked if we should continue with the teachings, he replied with a resounding “yes!” and flashlights were handed to both him and Sangye Khandro.

Thanks to the guidance, kindness, and wisdom of Khenchen Namdrol, Sangye Khandro, Lama Chonam, Shashi Reitz, and so many others, who together showed us by example how to embrace the given circumstances, we collectively were able to let the rain rinse us clean of obstacles that otherwise might have prevented such profound teachings and blessings to occur. Exciting times lie ahead for our little sangha, as the seeds, which generously were sown so long ago by Gyatrul Rinpoche, continue to grow and flourish. Thank you Rinpoche.

May all beings benefit.
**Center Reports**

**Los Angeles Yeshe Nyingpo Celebrates 25th Anniversary**

by Valri J. Swift

Yeshe Nyingpo Los Angeles was founded in January 1983 by H.H. Dudjom Rinpoche. Since that time, the LA center has held regular practices, sponsored teachings by many eminent lamas of various lineages, and provided support for the dharma in the southern California area.

The Venerable Gyatrul Rinpoche was appointed spiritual director of the LA center and has made visits to encourage spiritual practice and sangha development. In 1993, under the direction of Gyatrul Rinpoche, a corporation was formed under the name of Southern California Region Yeshe Nyingpo. David Johnston was instrumental in maintaining the organization until he moved to the Santa Cruz area in 1996. Suzanne Soehner maintained it from 1996-98. Sondra Bennett, who moved to Ojai and formed Osel Nyingpo was also active during those years. Ed Heckerman, a student of Shenphen Dawa Rinpoche, and his wife Simone Heckerman, have been most influential in keeping the center alive from 1998 until the present. Ed serves as president while his wife is the corresponding secretary. Sangha members Lorraine Suzuki and Valri Swift serve as recording secretary and treasurer, respectively.

In addition to hosting a talk by Gyatrul Rinpoche in the spring of 2006, the sangha was happy to host a talk by Yangthang Tulku Rinpoche in December 2006, with the help of Sondra Bennett. We sponsored a teaching on the union of Mahamudra and Dzogchen in April 2007 by Lama Jampa Thaye and are scheduled to host a teaching by Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche in the next year or so.

We are hoping to do something special in January 2008 to celebrate our 25 years as an organization devoted to spreading the precious buddhadharma and fulfilling the wishes of our esteemed teachers.

**Report From Portland Yeshe Nyingpo**

by Dick O’Connor

Our small center continues to hold meditation practice each Sunday, and every now and then new folks come in to learn about Buddhism. To accommodate these new practitioners, our resident monk Clark Hansen has been providing instruction on the basics of meditation practice.

Clark has also recently participated in the Teachers’ Conference sponsored by the Northwest Dharma Association, on whose Board he serves as Vice President. Clark has also been busy making connections to the Asian Buddhist community. He has made numerous contacts and has participated in the opening of a new temple.

Some of our sangha members were able to travel to Tashi Choling for the Vajrakilaya retreat in October.

Plans are being laid to expand the temple in the back of Clark’s house on Skyline Boulevard. Another member of the Northwest Dharma Association Board, Richard Miles, a Zen monk, has formed a construction crew that works to build smaller temples to assist other Buddhist sanghas, regardless of their tradition. Several of the Portland Yeshe Nyingpo members are also assisting in this effort.

May all beings be liberated from suffering!
Osel Nyingpo had a quiet, but good year in 2007. We met in our shrine room on Sunday mornings and continued to deepen our practice and study of the Dudjom Tersar ngondro. During the winter months, we held dharma movie nights once a month, which was great way of getting together, watching and learning about the dharma either through story-line movies or reviewing teachings by different lamas.

Some of us went to the desert last spring to visit with Gyatral Rinpoche, Lama Chonam and Sangye Khandro. In his own inimitable way, Rinpoche gave us a short teaching in his trailer that was very penetrating. Another most significant event was our visit to Pasadena last fall to see His Holiness Penor Rinpoche. Even though he was there to rest and recover from his bout with TB, he very kindly granted us an audience. We, of course, invited him to return to Ojai when he recovers and he said that he would.

Presently, we are praying that Gyatral Rinpoche will be in good enough health to come to Ojai sometime this winter, 2008. Since it has been two & a half years since Rinpoche has been to the Ojai – Santa Barbara area, our sangha has very much been looking forward to his visit. We are also hoping that this coming year will bring more lamas to our Osel Nyingpo center.
Center Reports

Tashi Choling Report: Dharma Without Borders
by Gaea Yudron

On New Years’ Day 2007, Venerable Yangthang Rinpoche blessed us by giving empowerment and teachings. Later that winter, Sangye Khandro led a 5-day Troma retreat. Our Losar practice was local, low-key and family style.

In spring, things began to rev up. Long-awaited changes happened in the statue garden as new steel poles were erected and the statue roofs were reset. Around that same time, some dedicated builders began creating a sang khang in front of the temple. In Tibet every monastery has a sang khang, a structure used for smoke offerings—and now we do, too!

In May, the Venerable Gyatrul Rinpoche and Lingtrul Rinpoche graced us with their presence at the annual Dorsem retreat. It was then that we literally began to get a roll on. Rinpoche wanted us to set up 18 prayer wheels around three sides of the Vajrasattva statue. In a wonderfully auspicious way, Chhoje Rinpoche of Padma Shedrup Ling of Marin County offered mantra sheets containing 100 million mantras, primarily of Vajrasattva, to Gyatrul Rinpoche. These were blessed by Venerable Yangthang Rinpoche. Shortly afterwards, 100 70-lb. burlap sacks filled with blessings arrived at TC’s doorsteps.

Mantra rolling then became our primary focus. The scientifically-minded observed that an entire roll could be completed in the break between meditation sessions, and many were completed that way. It was an enormous effort. Paradoxically, it also happened rather easily. By late summer, we were installing the 18 prayer wheels around the statue.

Sangha members arrived from a variety of other locales, and everyone joined in painting the prayer wheels. People cooked delicious food, and we enjoyed each other’s company. In the...
...continued from previous page

summer we also installed a new hip roof on the prayer wheel building to protect the beautiful frescos inside from moisture damage.

In late August, Khenpo Norgay returned for two weeks to continue teaching on the Ornament of the Middle Way. Gyatrul Rinpoche was in residence for months, and we were treated to his humor, penetrating insight and teachings at dusk in the statue garden, rare and memorable times.

In September we performed a rigorous 4-day cleanup on the land, filling a dumpster with stuff that had been lying around way too long. We purchased a storage container, something that looks a lot like a railroad car without wheels, as a cheap solution for our storage needs.

Before the Vajrakilaya retreat, Lama Sonam came from Padma Osel Ling near Santa Cruz to teach sacred instruments, and thanks to his help, kangling has been added to our sacred orchestra. Our Vajrakilaya retreat was very familial and close this year with Venerable Gyatrul Rinpoche in attendance. “The whole year was family style,” one sangha member reports.

Meanwhile, the educational program students were on the move. They provided umsed and choden services at the Ten Shuk at Orgyen Dorje Den in July. In September they traveled to San Jose to help as Gyatrul Rinpoche gave empowerments at the new dharma center, Dechen Rang. In November, they were back at ODD providing their services at the Dudjom Tersar wangs. As one longtime student of Rinpoche’s noted, “We used to have to find Tibetans to run dharma practice events, but now the educational program students are so well-trained, they can do everything and support Rinpoche’s centers wherever they are needed.”

“Projects happened as if by magic,” an educational program student added. “Every time we started something, lots of people just showed up.” It’s true. People just appeared. There were many familiar faces, and many new ones. “Everything just wove together,” another sangha member mused.

Lama Chonam taught young sangha members, especially Mariposa, 10, and Che, 8. By the end of the year, these two youngsters took part in both Vajrakilaya and Troma retreats, inspiring us by their level of understanding and attention.

While many sangha members traveled to attend the Dudjom Tersar wangs at ODD, some who remained at Tashi Choling applied themselves to refinishing the shrine room floor. Now with a beautiful bamboo floor, wonderful mirrors behind the statues on the shrine, and lovely chandeliers illuminating each statue, the shrine room is even more beautiful than ever.

At the end of December, several students set out on pilgrimage to India with Sangye Khandro and Lama Chonam. “Everyone is going away,” says Ani Baba in December. “It will be a very quiet winter.” She is looking forward to that. Picture her enjoying the snow as she faithfully maintains her daily practice in the shrine room, just as she has for so many years.

And then spring will come and new dharma projects and activities will sprout like flowers. Won’t you come and join us this year at Tashi Choling — the dharma center without borders?
Another year has passed, providing a chance to review the activities of the preceding months. In November, a long-time wish came to fruition—Khenchen Palden Sherab Rinpoche and Khenpo Tsewang Dongyal Rinpoche, the Khenpo Rinpoches, bestowed the entire collection of wangs from H.H. Dudjom Rinpoche, Jigdral Yeshe Dorje. It was a wonderful event, attended by over 200 students from around the world. The nine days of empowerments were very smooth. “harmonious” as the lamas like to say, with everyone cooperating and helping in his or her own way. Perhaps most noteworthy was the contribution from Tashi Choling’s very own “shedra students” who were indispensable to the success and beauty of the event. They were involved in every aspect of the wangs, from identifying the scriptures, making tormas, and setting up the altar to the enactment of the lamas’ activities during the actual wangs, as the chopens. They learned a lot and enjoyed the program, and the attendees marveled at and really appreciated all their efforts, performed with tireless equanimity, grace and humility.

The collective merit of Orgyen Dorje Den also ripened with visits from numerous other esteemed lamas. These included teachings and empowerments from H.H. Getse Rinpoche, H.H. Phakchok Rinpoche, H.E. Namkha Drimed Rinpoche, Khentrul Gyangkhang Rinpoche, and Khenchen Tsewang Gyatso Rinpoche. We received ngondro teachings from Ven. Gyatrul Rinpoche, because Rinpoche knows that we “all need to learn and practice ngondro.” In July we had the Ten Shuk ceremony for Rinpoche, which was presided over by Ven. Lingtrul Rinpoche, included a large fish release and a special visit by Khenchen Namdrol Rinpoche on the final day.

As a sangha we continue to regularly perform the Dudjom Tersar Dakini and Guru Rinpoche tsogs twice a month and Vajrasattva practice on a weekly basis. Lama Drimed leads Chenrezig practice and a fish release monthly and Trinley Dorje supports many of our practices as umsed. Les Collins’ Wednesday Sitting Meditation Class has a strong following from which many new students have taken refuge and are joining the ranks as excellent supporters of ODD.

The temple continues to evolve as a comfortable and supportive place for dharma activities. This year, thanks to a generous sponsor, we had a new heater professionally installed. Our tried and true in-house construction crew built new shrine cabinets and our expert seamstresses handcrafted brocade door hangings for the shrine room.
We’re grateful to Rinpoche and all the lamas he has brought to ODD, and for all the opportunities to learn and practice, and hopeful that we can all continue together and gain real accomplishment. More new students are coming for practice these days, but there is still plenty of room, so we encourage and welcome you to come whenever you can and participate in practice or attend teachings and empowerments. If you have the resources, please consider becoming a financial supporter and thereby merge your good intentions with all of ours.

**Dechen Rang Dharma Center**

by Iwen Wang

Dechen Rang Dharma Center was founded in San Jose, California in 2004 by the Venerable Lama Drimed Lodro. The center began as a gathering of Chinese dharma practitioners. Now, some Vietnamese practitioners have also begun to attend, and students from ODD also come to teachings, which take place twice a month on the 2nd and 4th Sundays. Our center carries on the lineage of H.H. Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche.

Gyatru Rinpocher has provided inconceivable assistance and blessings during the formation of Dechen Rang Dharma Center. Lama Drimed cordially invited Gyatrul Rinpocher to bestow Amitabha and Green Tara empowerments as the inauguration ceremony. With such auspicious dependent origination, Lama Drimed sincerely hopes that all fortunate participants will make connection and aspire to take rebirth in Dewachen, the Amitabha Pure Land.

**Introduction to Lama Drimed**

Lama Drimed Lodro was born to a nomadic family full of many renowned practitioners and yogis such as the Venerable Gyatrul Rinpoche and Khenpo Lobsang Chophel Rinpoche. Lama Drimed demonstrated astonishing faith and passion towards dharma when he was three. He started to attend Chinese school at the age of seven. When he was twelve, he began to learn Tibetan from the highly accomplished Galo Rinpoche and mastered the language without difficulty.

Lama Drimed entered the renowned Sertha Larung Five Sciences Buddhist Academy at the age of 15. He accepted ordination at the feet of H. H. Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche and received major oral transmissions, pith instructions, and empowerments within the Nyingma lineage, especially the Great Perfection empowerment and many precious terma.

Under his uncle Khenpo Lobsang Chophel Rinpoche’s rigorous training, Lama Drimed finished all the required courses for the qualification of a Khenpo’s degree. After completing his degree, he traveled to India to acquire more teachings from H.H. Pema Norbu Rinpoche, the supreme head of the Palyul lineage in Nyingma school. Lama Drimed has received such empowerments as Nyingtig Yabzhi (Four Heart-Essences), Zhi Khro (A Hundred Peaceful and Wrathful Deities), ‘Dus Pa Mdo (root tantra of Anuyoga), and many others in the Palyul lineage. He also conducted the Chinese translation for these valuable empowerments.

He traveled around China to give teachings at the request of H.H. Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche. He also served as the major translator during certain teachings and empowerments of H.H. Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche and H.H. Penor Rinpoche.

Lama Drimed came to the States in 2003 at the request of his uncle, the Venerable Gyatrul Rinpoche, with the intention to propagate Buddhadharma and benefit beings in the West. He is the resident lama of Orgyen Dorje Den and gives regular teachings at Orgyen Dorje Den and Dechen Rang. All are welcome to join the Vajra world and enjoy the wisdom nectar.
Teaching the Dharma
by Lama Bruce Newman

Teaching the dharma has been the greatest joy of my life. Although I’ve done many years of practice, the experiences that arise through meditation do not for me equal the joy at seeing others change and knowing that in some small way I’ve been a catalyst for that change. It’s incredibly satisfying and incredibly rewarding.

I’ve been teaching under Gyatrul Rinpoche’s auspices at his centers since 1995. I must have taught thousands of people to follow their breath since then! And although I have the title ‘lama’ I know I’m still very much an ordinary person with the five poisons blazing like autumn fires in California. I consider myself more of an older student than a real teacher and I’m very much a Westerner. No matter how many years I practice, I think like a Westerner, dress like a Westerner, and, of course, look like one too. So what I’m about to say must be taken with that context in mind.

The greatest joy in teaching is, of course, knowing that you are benefiting others. I think all humans are driven to search for some meaning in their lives and whether they are atheists, theists, or Buddhists, the search for meaning usually comes down to ‘making the world a better place.’ By teaching Buddhism, I feel confident that I am doing just that in a very profound and beneficial way. I’ve seen people change and some dramatically. Many others are able to relax and calm themselves. Having meaning in my life is an incredibly satisfying experience.

I’m incredibly fortunate that, because I teach, I can be a fulltime Buddhist practitioner. I don’t have an ordinary day job. I can read dharma books as part of my job—they are even tax-deductible! I also know that the more I practice, the better a teacher I will be—I will have more varied experiences and a greater perspective on the meditations of my students.

Teaching the dharma really deepens my own understanding. If I’m going to explain some point of theory or guide someone through some aspect of meditative experience, I really have to contemplate deeply upon what I’m doing. For example I’ve taught The Seven Points of Mind Training perhaps a dozen times by now. I never get tired or bored by it and every time I teach it my understanding of it deepens as I consider new ways of leading others through the text. Of course I learn a lot from my students, who are almost always very mature and serious in their application of the dharma, by their insights, experiences, and probing questions.

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One of the most amazing things about teaching is when one says things while teaching that one hadn’t thought of before. The blessings of the teaching situation have awakened insights on the spot that I’ve never had before. It can be quite exhilarating. I don’t really know where the insights are coming from and I sometimes wish that I could take notes.

Practicing the dharma, especially meditation, has never been easy for me and it would be easy to look back on my years of practice as a failure. But because I have had these difficulties and obstacles, I am capable of steering others away from them at best or at least guiding them through them. Because my meditation is still filled with lots of thoughts, I can give students lots of little tricks for dealing with them or support for those for whom the tricks don’t work. I often say that because I’ve such a bad meditator for so long, that it’s almost impossible for someone to have an obstacle in his or her practice that I haven’t already spent a lot of time trying to deal with. So this transforms my sense of failure into something that is meaningful—if through these errors, I can benefit another, then they are not signs of failure.

As a teacher, it is inevitable that I will be taken as an example by newer students. That forces me to pull my socks up. Not only I how I dress, sit, or behave in public, but whether I’m indulging in the five poisons or trying to deal with them. I have a responsibility to others to do what I am advising them to do. Teaching helps me pull out of hypocrisy, cynicism, and slacking off.

One of the most interesting and wonderful benefits of teaching is how it changes and increases guru devotion. One instruction in guru devotion is to mimic the behavior of the guru. Teaching gives me that opportunity. When I’m teaching and I momentarily recall my teacher, I feel blessed and inspired. Also when I hear him teach, I appreciate it on a new level—not only am I gaining instructions on how to practice but also instructions on how to teach. I’ve also thoroughly enjoyed taking the published teachings from my two main teachers, Gyatrul Rinpoche and Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche, and teaching them myself.

I’d like to now say something about the dangers and challenges for an ordinary person like myself teaching. The two most obvious challenges are when teaching is used to satisfy one’s financial and emotional needs.

As I said earlier, it’s wonderful to be able to be a ‘fulltime’ Buddhist through the money I get teaching. The downside is when I start counting students in a class to see if I’m making a minimal amount of money for that class. Sometimes the best advice I can give someone is to study somewhere else but of course I lose that revenue. If someone comes to me, I have to be very discerning about recommending a class based on their needs and recommending one based on mine. I always have to be aware and put the other person’s needs ahead of my own. It can be pretty stressful.

Emotional needs can be stickier than the financial ones. Many of us who are teachers spent a good part of our younger years separated from normal activity so that we could study and practice. We can find ourselves in middle age as teachers, respected and admired by others, but still emotionally immature due to our decades of disengagement. It’s easy to let your students fulfill your needs for love, affection, and respect. However if you allow that to happen, it can be very dangerous. Students can be manipulated and their proper training overlooked. A teacher can confuse the student’s inability or refusal to fulfill one’s needs with disrespect for the dharma. If we look around at some of the disasters that have hit dharma centers in the last twenty or thirty years, I would bet many if not most of them revolve around this one issue: the emotional immaturity of the teacher. And I would like to propose a simple solution to any aspiring teachers: get married. Get
your love and respect from one person whose job it is to provide for your emotional needs and leave your students out of it.

A more subtle challenge is confusing one’s interpretation of the dharma with the dharma itself. Some people feel, for example, that I am mixing the dharma with Western psychology. I myself feel that I am taking what I have learned and experienced and I expressing that in terms that are meaningful both to me and my listeners. If I use the term ‘superego’ to refer to our habit to judge ourselves unkindly, am I simply using the closest English term or am ‘psychologizing’ the dharma? There’s a big difference between the two: one is a dilution and distortion of the dharma while the other is an accurate and valid presentation of it. How does the teacher distinguish? In my case I check in with my teachers and present my understanding. I never seem to have enough time to do this but so far it doesn’t seem I am making many major mistakes.

Also, I go through my own interests and experiences and it’s easy to want others to do the same. It’s where my inspiration is, at least at that moment. If I’m having success letting go of self-judgment, then I will think this is a crucial part of the dharma and want everyone else to do the same. If mind is more open than normal, I will teach openness in my meditation classes. Of course insights and experiences fade and I have to be careful that my students are stuck with the leftovers. If these experiences are so fleeting for me, why should I feel they have any meaning for someone else?

I’ve also had some difficulty positing reasonable expectations for my students. Milarepa may have attained complete Buddhahood in one lifetime, but is it reasonable to expect someone in a weekly evening class in Ashland to do the same? Should I dangle the amazing experiences and profound techniques accessible through the Vajrayana in order to draw in and inspire newcomers, or is it more honest and better for others to say, ‘Unless you follow Milarepa’s example, that level of experience is not really available to you. However, even in your present situation through applying the teachings, you can significantly shift your mind and interact with the world in a much more skillful and compassionate manner.’ I tend towards the latter but perhaps I am discouraging others.

I will conclude with a challenge all of us face: we live in a non-Buddhist world where we may meet and interact with people who have no other connection with the dharma. If we act and speak appropriately, we can attract those people. If we don’t, their one connection with Buddhism in this life may have been squandered! We all have been in this situation, but I feel it acutely when giving introductory talks and answering questions. I’ve turned people off by saying that their pets probably won’t be good practitioners; I’ve turned off others by making them feel that the teachings on the precious human birth is an elitist and judgmental teaching. Maybe I’m just making a big deal out of nothing, but I always feel a lot rides on my answer.

Throughout the West, Westerners are now taking most of the responsibilities for teachings others Westerners. We have no clear guidelines or roadmaps for doing so and we still have a lot of our own flaws and negativities to purify while trying our best to help others. But we are learning as we go along and we are trying our best. And hopefully the blessings of the Three Jewels will still pass through us.
In the summer of 2006, Mirror of Wisdom moved from Orgyen Dorje Den in Alameda, California to Tashi Choling in Ashland, Oregon. This was in accordance with Rinpoche’s wishes, expressed some five years earlier while enroute to Tashi Choling from Half Moon Bay. During this particular car trip, he startled his student companions by saying that he envisioned Mirror of Wisdom moving to Tashi Choling and being run by the Educational Program students and volunteers -- “later, when they are ready”. Well, apparently “later” came in the summer of 2006 -- and somewhat to the surprise of the Educational Program students, they were suddenly deemed “ready”!

So it was that the Educational Program students became responsible for Mirror of Wisdom’s operations, with help from Tashi Choling sangha members. There were literally tons of materials to unpack and sort. We spent the rest of 2006 getting settled and evaluating how to proceed. Over the next several months, the students found ways to incorporate Mirror of Wisdom activities into their daily routine of studying the dharma and learning Tibetan. In fact, they found myriad ways to streamline and improve Mirror of Wisdom’s operations. Our customers seem to have noticed the improvements, too, in particular the quicker turnaround time in getting their orders filled. Many have expressed their delight that the care and feeding of Mirror of Wisdom is now in the hands of the very capable Educational Program students and their small cadre of volunteers at Tashi Choling.

Now, the students spend countless hours going up and down the East Wing stairs to process and pack orders, getting them ready to be shipped. Besides the boundless merit, Mirror of Wisdom seems to be providing everyone involved with an excellent exercise regime! The truth is, however, that Mirror of Wisdom is very cramped for space, shoe-horned as it is currently into the East Wing where three small rooms upstairs have become our shipping, inventory, and pecha departments. The bookstore downstairs does double-duty as our accounting, administration, and Internet order areas as well. Things work, but it is very crowded.

And, you see, that’s why we’ve recently been dreaming of developing a building specifically for Mirror of Wisdom. Not surprisingly, Gyatrul Rinpoche dropped suggestions a mere six months after we moved Mirror of Wisdom north that maybe it needed its own building. As scary as that thought was to those of us who have just been through the recently-completed East Wing construction efforts, it is apparent that our guru has hit the proverbial nail squarely on the head once again. A new building for Mirror of Wisdom is precisely what is needed. And just as we were beginning to come to grips with this fact, Rinpoche was out choosing a site for the new building – on the hill directly behind the temple/residence building!

Even though we have not yet formally initiated a capital campaign to raise money for the new building, news of the new building spread by word-of-mouth – and $60,000 in donations magically manifested from inspired sangha members around the world! This display of Rinpoche’s wisdom activity has inspired all of us and given us a definite sense that Mirror of Wisdom will be moving to its own building sometime in the not-too-distant future!
At this time, we are planning the building with Gyatrul Rinpoche as our guiding and inspirational force. We are working with a land use specialist in Jackson County to determine what type of structure will be allowed. Once we get the site and land-use approval, we will begin working with contractors to determine the size and cost of the building.

Once we have our own building, Mirror of Wisdom will have sufficiently large areas to house all its many archival materials including vast and ever-growing quantities of books, practice materials, audio and video recordings, pechas, photographs, as well as financial records and accounting materials. We hope that the new building will also have a couple of soundproof rooms that will allow digitizing and editing of precious old audio and video tapes that have begun to deteriorate with age. Thanks to Jane Hall and Ian Villareal’s tireless efforts over the years, many of the old video tapes in Mirror of Wisdom’s archives have been digitized and preserved with their own equipment in their home. On the audio end, thanks to a generous donation from a sponsor last year, we were able to purchase equipment so that Keith LaCoste could begin the tedious process of digitizing the thousands of hours of audio recordings in our archives. It would be wonderful to house both of these important operations under one roof and to have enough room and the proper equipment to allow many more volunteer staff to gain merit and help in this very important effort. (If you are so inspired, please contact us.) As Rinpoche noted in his 2004 Mirror of Wisdom Newsletter article:

“For example, we all know how wonderful it is to actually see the videos of the Karmapa and Dudjom Rinpoche. Just imagine what it would be like if we could see videos of Guru Rinpoche and the twenty-five disciples at Samye Monastery! For future generations, what we record on video right now will mean that much to them. This is not for ourselves; this is for all beings that will follow us.”

This year, we were also very happy to be able to provide practice materials to various centers in response to teachings and events that they were sponsoring, and we want to do more of this as time goes on. We are happy that things are going so well, and yet we cannot help but notice how slowly they go, because we do not have enough volunteers. All of the Educational Program students’ efforts and that of our current tiny group of volunteers go to keeping Mirror of Wisdom afloat rather than to future development. What we really need at Tashi Choling are several more people who can commit to regular participation, even if it is only one or two hours a week, to help with the day-to-day operations. With enough stable sangha member support for ongoing Mirror of Wisdom operations, the Educational Program students would be able to turn their attention to another extremely important aspect of Mirror of Wisdom — translations, transcriptions, and book production, for example.

Finally, our beautiful website is undergoing a renovation right now to update it and make it easier to maintain by staff members without special training. We hope to launch the revised site by mid-2008. Keep checking back; when the new site goes live, it will have many new products available to order via the Internet! It will also be a source of news and information about all the many activities of Mirror of Wisdom and ways in which you can participate.

From all the Mirror of Wisdom staff here at Tashi Choling, we wish you a wonderful new year and we hope that we can help you find the materials you need to accomplish the dharma and fulfill the purpose of all beings. Tashi Deleg!

Mirror of Wisdom was established by the Venerable Gyatrul Rinpoche in order to archive and propagate the sacred tradition of Tibetan Buddhism. Today, Mirror of Wisdom offers dharma books, commentaries and teachings, sadhanas (practice texts) and traditional Tibetan pechas. We also produce audio and video recordings of oral teachings and liturgical practices. Mirror of Wisdom has a large collection of photographic images of sacred Buddhist artworks, ritual supports, and portraits of revered lamas. (Please visit our website at www.mirrorofwisdom.org to learn more.)
BC: Dharma students always want to first hear what brought you to the dharma? How did you meet Gyatrul Rinpoche?

Ani Rioh: One might think that living in the beautiful Sausalito hills north of San Francisco would bring a measure of happiness, but I was not happy. I had an intense work schedule and for years I had been longing to find something to fill the painful void inside myself. I had checked out most of the New Age programs but the gaping unfulfilled void persisted. I began having dreams, about the need to abandon my current lifestyle. Psychics also told me this, but I did not know what to do, though I did know that the next phase of my life had to do with purification. A series of dreams directed me to head north. So I did.

I was living with a friend from Oregon, and in April 1982 we decided to take a trip north. When we got near the Oregon/California border, there was a huge sign at Hilt – Land for Sale – so we exited I-5 and followed the signs to the land, where we camped that night. I had previously dreamed of a place where I could have a house in the middle of land and small cabins around it. People could come, be quiet, and find peace and respite from the chaos of their busy lives. There I could serve them, cook and do their laundry. Maybe this was it.

The next morning, on our way out, we stopped along the dirt road that went through the land (which is now the driveway from the Colestine Rd. to the statue garden). I stood watching the water trickle down a little creek by the meadow, and Steve took a walk. A car came down the narrow country road and stopped. A lady got out (I later found out this was Sangye) and a very friendly man dressed in burgundy colored clothes asked “Hello, where are you from, and what are you doing here?” I told him I was looking for a new place to live and a place where people could come stay for a while. It was a very brief conversation.

They left. Steve went to Ashland, and I returned home to begin making arrangements to move to that land. I knew I had to return. Steve was invited to a teaching in Ashland, where he met Gyatrul Rinpoche. When he came back to Sausalito, he told me about Rinpoche. We again traveled to Oregon in May. This time we found out about the statue right next door to the land. When I visited the statue and I saw beloved Rinpoche there, the friendly man in the burgundy clothes, I knew I had met my teacher. I didn’t know it was Buddhism.

I went home, and packed up my life. After several trips back and forth, attending teachings in Ashland, I returned in August for good, with my 2 doggies and a VW van. As it turned out, the land thing didn’t work out. But, I was the one to live in the little cabin.
(actually a yurt) right next door to the statue, peaceful and quiet, discovering the precious treasures of dharma. I became a student of beloved Rinpoche. In September my studies began in earnest. I entered six-month retreat in December that very year. I still live nearby 25 years later.

BC: How did you decide to become a nun? Did it change your life?

Ani Rihoh: Becoming a yogi had always appealed to me, I never wanted to become a nun. But…when I was told that His Holiness Penor Rinpoche was coming to Tashi Choling and going to give vows to one monk, I instantly knew I would take vows, as Rinpoche had no one here in robes at that time. I took vows as an offering to the sangha. It did change my life. I had always thought vows would be a lot more rules to follow, and I wanted less. When I put the robes on for the first time, it felt as if being wrapped in warmth and protection. The vows gave me a freedom never before experienced, a more simple, yet more profound view of life.

BC: We know that “vintage” as used in the context of this column is not just referring to having been in the sangha for a long time, but also means OLD. Is it surprising to you that you got old? What is different, in your experience, about being in your 60s rather than, say in your 40s.

Ani Rihoh: Rinpoche has said I was getting old many times. But I never thought I was really old, just getting there. Inside I actually feel younger, but the body feels less responsive to my wishes and much slower, with more girth, less like “me”, and more like a dear friend or a dwelling in need of much more maintenance. When I was 40, my mind and body seemed to be a solid unit. My mind was so busy with trying to accomplish what I thought was success, and achieving for tomorrow, it never noticed the moment, and was miserable because of being so disconnected from an inner peace. Now at 67 I notice that living the moment, accepting the now, includes tomorrow, yesterday, inside and out, and all there seems to be, all at the same time. There is nothing to achieve other than being as present as possible.

BC: More than many in this comfortable country, you’ve had a lot of experience with sickness and death. How have these experiences affected your dharma practice?

Ani Rihoh: I have been so grateful for having met Rinpoche, and having the privilege to practice the sublime, precious dharma. I am trying to learn patience, that obstacles and illness, especially life-threatening illness are opportunities for purification, a chance to practice bodhicitta, moments to reflect on karma and the preciousness of human life, all of life, and how incredibly sad it is for those who do not have the dharma. Honestly, I don’t know how they even make it through the day. To me death is a shocking reminder of impermanence and what precious little time we have to live virtuously, and how much time we have spent accumulating non-virtue. I made a promise when my daughter died to honor her with virtuous thoughts, deeds and words, and not to entertain negativity or non-virtue ever again. I repeat it over and over again as it is not so easy. Life seems so short to engage in anything unworthy, what a waste that would be. I wish for a longer life to have more time to practice.

As a single parent to an only child, the tendency is to focus, love and protect that child, perhaps more than anyone else. When the child is gone and it seems there is no object for that affection, when the intense sadness that has engulfed you feels as if it begins to lift, and the heart that has been ripped open begins to heal, we then see that there is only love. There is no possessor nor single recipient, no object or subject. No longer limited to that child, the heart opens to all, including and permeating all, even yourself. The line between me, mine, self, other dissolves into oneness. Truly just one heart. One is then able to focus on the greater good and not be
limited by the self as one, but all as one. This is the gift the sangha gave when we all entered the heart of Rinpoche through the door of compassion. That love is life, living compassion. It just is.

BC: Do you think it is necessary to suffer to “truly practice the sublime teachings”?

Ani Rioh: It seems we suffer most intensely because we are separated, dualistic, closed off, unaware, ignorant of our true nature. Because of this, there is no stability, joy, awareness, or confidence, only perceiving constant change, fear of other, engaging the five poisons, believing in a separate self/me. From whom does this come? Honesty is crucial. This me is what practices the sublime teachings. Once we become aware, merge, become one with our nature and out of that, act purely, transcend, dissolve conceptuality and duality, then there is no suffering, no change. But as long as there is we, self, other, there is suffering and we must thus truly practice the sublime teachings. This is difficult. Change is suffering; samsara/duality is change. To truly practice sublime teachings is born out of suffering, the nature of which is one and the same.

Q: Vanessa, When did you come to the dharma? How old were you?

I was born into the dharma. My mother and father were both practitioners, although my father faced serious obstacles in his life. My mother is a student of His Holiness Dudjom Rinpoche and Venerable Gyatrul Rinpoche, so I was born straight into the lap of Gyatrul Rinpoche. He has been a constant presence in my life since I was a baby, although I did not take an individual interest in really practicing dharma until I was about eleven or twelve.

Q: Vanessa, What or who inspired you to become a Tibetan translator?

Gyatral Rinpoche. He is the reason I began studying. His blessings made all the circumstances right. Alan Wallace was also a tremendous teacher and inspiration to me. Soon after I started learning Tibetan, Lama Gytazo began to support me in my studies by sending me to study at monasteries in India, and by teaching me Tibetan on his own. His support and blessings helped me to improve more rapidly. Sangye Khandro inspired me because she translates not just the words, but the feeling, the personality, the mood of the teachers. And she seems very humble but not in a false, trying-too-hard-to-look humble sort of way. She is just quiet and genuine, so it makes people naturally want to respect her. She is confident but not prideful. Matthiew Ricard is inspiring. He seems to just translate purely from his Guru Yoga, so there is no pretense. Also, I look up to Shashi and Ila Reitz. They are incredible practitioners. Wow.
They are a constant inspiration to me. Amazing.

Q: You went to India to study and learn the Tibetan language. How long were you there and what life experiences did you have that inspired you? What hardships were discouraging?

Immersion is the most helpful condition for learning a language. After two years taking classes in USA, I went for my first trip to India under the guidance of Lama Gyatso, and stayed with the young monks in a small monastery connected to His Holiness Dodrupchen Rinpoche. The first time I was there for a little over a month, and I remember going thinking that it would be relatively easy. I had my textbook Tibetan and my sentences memorized. I could read and write. It seemed like it would be a breeze.

But just after I got there, I became very discouraged. The lamas and monks were not speaking the way that the Tibetans would speak in the textbook examples. Everything was so fast and it sounded like the teacher’s muffled voice in Charlie Brown episodes. I kept feeling like I would hear a bunch of sounds but could not seem to catch up fast enough to distinguish words. For example, if I had learned how to say, “how are you today,” they would say “hey, howzit goin?” I would try to find the word, “howzitgoin.” Any casual sentence that would deviate even slightly from the textbook sentences I had learned was completely unrecognizable. I remember how embarrassing it was to have to keep saying, “La? La? Yang-kyar sung-ro-nang. Go –tsoo ma song” which means, “What? Could you please repeat that? I did not understand.”

Every night I would cry myself to sleep thinking that I would never get through it. But no matter how discouraged I felt, I just kept attending classes with the other monks, the only white face and the only girl in a monastery of little Tibetan boys aging from five to sixteen. I kept a notebook with me constantly and would write down EVERYTHING. The monks were very kind to me and they would define words and answer questions for me all the time.

Then I had to return to the states. It was the beginning of my junior year at University. It was bitter-sweet, because my amazing Tibetan teacher, Alan Wallace, was taking his leave from the university to pursue his mission and establish his institute, so he was replaced. I missed Alan Wallace and his vivacious, incredible teaching style. It was a sad and lonely year without him. All of his students were grieving. No one could possibly even approach his level of teaching because Alan is not only a scholar, (tog-ge-wa, in Tibetan), but a serious dharma practitioner and lama himself. Therefore, due to his pure dharma practice and the blessing of his lamas, his qualities are truly unrivaled. Sometimes Shashi and I would write down specific Tibetan questions or dharma questions to ask him and the next day in class he would address our questions without us saying a word, exactly as though he could read our minds. We rarely had to actually ask him because he is a bit of a mind-reader!

After that, I met my true love, Pema, who is a native and therefore speaks the language. He helped me tremendously. To this day we speak only in Tibetan, which is very helpful. When you have a boyfriend, you want to spend every waking minute with him. You will be talking to them on the phone many times a day. So it helps when the person you are in love with speaks the language you are learning. Then you do not waste time. Even idle chatter became like Tibetan practice sessions!

Q: What have been the most difficult issues for you to cope with in your young life? Has being a student of dharma helped you overcome those problems? If so…in what way?

My father died a terrible death when I was eleven. Then when I was thirteen, my mother and I were brutally assaulted in our home by a crazy neighbor. My
mother almost died and I was hospitalized for weeks. It changed my life forever. It made me get serious about dharma. It made me lose that sense of invincibility. In fact, I am always grateful for this event in my life because I know it ripened a lot of my karma and really turned my mind toward the precious dharma. And I think that Gyatral Rinpoche’s blessing saved our lives.

After the assault Sondra Bennett really took me under her wing and brought me to see many great lamas, including Chagdud Tulku Rinpoche, Penor Rinpoche, and others. She really helped me through so much. This is an example of how sangha really is the third jewel. I am always grateful to Sondra for her kindness to me and my family.

Q: What, beyond your teachers, is it that keeps you committed to the dharma?

Fear of death.

Q: In conclusion, is there anything you might want to say to young people who might be entering the dharma?

First of all, I would tell them that they should take refuge in Gyatral Rinpoche or someone like him. If they seek his protection and trust in his guidance, they will bloom into incredible practitioners and teachers for future generations. Gyatral Rinpoche is a living Buddha. Kids who meet him are so lucky.

Second, never touch cigarettes. The other thing I would say is, DO NOT MAKE RASH AND IMPULSIVE DECISIONS without examining carefully. People have a tendency to be very extreme. Suddenly they want to become a monk or a nun, quit school and join a monastery in Nepal. Suddenly they want to join a hermitage and take ngakpa vows. Suddenly they want to blow their college savings and take a one-way ticket to Bhutan to follow a vision. These inclinations come from a deep connection to dharma and they are very fortunate to have such a longing for dharma. The problem is, when you make rash choices without really waiting and checking, you end up renouncing your practice later because you begin to feel trapped.

Listen to your teacher and be simple. Do not be too extreme. Always ask your guru before you make rash decisions about your future. The idea is to stay in the dharma your whole life and not be too uptight or extreme that you wear yourself out. In essence, I think we need only look at Shashi and Ila to see examples of two amazing yet at the same time, completely simple and unpretentious young practitioners, who by the way are also translators, although they hide their qualities.
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